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AMERICA AND THE WAR.

BY SYDNEY BROOKS.

NINE months ago, at the time, that is, of the Bloemfontein Conference, when the Transvaal question was formally reopened, England and America stood closer together than at any period of their separate histories. The unstinted sympathy of the English people during the Spanish War, and especially the attitude and services of the British Government, had at last opened American eyes to what they should have seen long before; and, no doubt, would have seen, but for a host of factitious circumstances, aided perhaps by a little wilful blindness. To an Englishman of the post-bellum generation, who knew how genuine was the attachment to the United States that had grown up among all classes in England during the past thirty years, there was, indeed, almost a touch of absurdity in the astonishment with which America hailed the first proofs of it. But England's was not the only surprise which the war sprang upon the United States. The friendship for France and Russia which rested on the same basis of sentiment and tradition as the old enmity to England, and was equally divorced from present-day facts, crumbled away just as rapidly when put to a real test. Germany, who, in the simplicity of American inexperience had been counted on as at least a benevolent neutral, showed the snarling hostility expected of her by every one outside of the United States. America made her first essay in *Weltpolitik* in the teeth of a sullen and resentful Europe, and unwelcomed by any friend but England. The year 1898 has been called the year of Europe's discovery of America. It might much better be spoken of as the year of America's discovery of Europe. Then, for the first time, did the United States realize that it is not safe, and may be quite misleading and even a little foolish, to judge the present by the past—to conclude as a matter of course that the France of Lafayette is necessarily the

France of to-day, and that England must always be panting for a chance to fit out another "Alabama." We have grown used to being hated, envied and misrepresented on the Continent, but for America the experience was new. The enmity that used to be confined to the English nation was expanded to include all English-speaking peoples, and succeeded, of course, merely in bringing the two great divisions of the race into closer union. This union the essential tendency of the enormous quantity of history manufactured in the following two years greatly strengthened. Omdurman and Fashoda did something; Samoa more still; the Far Eastern crisis penetrated even the provincialism of Congress with a sense of the oneness of English and American interests; and as Americans advanced gingerly along the road of Imperialism and began to appreciate the nature of the boulders in their path, they came for the first time to a true perception of what England had done for the world, and of the difficulties she had met and conquered in doing it.

The two countries stood, in fact, just where most rational people wanted them to stand, and knew, even in the thick of Venezuelan squalls, that ultimately they must stand. The only nations on earth that have made it their policy to eschew formal alliances found themselves in an alliance that needed no official endorsement—an alliance of sympathy and kinship, and the understanding that comes from the possession of common aims and ideals. Better still, it was an alliance—I know Americans jib at the word, so I would be understood to use it in an ultra-Pickwickian sense—based on the enduring quality of national self-interest. It was remarkably free from gush on the British side; and on the American from that flattering suspiciousness of British diplomacy which wrecked the Arbitration Treaty—a suspiciousness that used to awake Homeric laughter among Englishmen, who are quite indignantly conscious that the great fault of their diplomacy is that there is nothing to suspect in it. It was, in short, a coming together of two nations, one of them long desirous of reconciliation, the other forced by events to stop playing at make-believes, especially the make-believe of being enemies, and collect herself for the effort of seeing things as they were. Out of tenderness to American prejudices, and to make the process of education as little startling as possible, neither Government cared to make any great official display of the new sentiment; but for all that, it was wide-

spread and profound. How profound and how widespread may be recalled from the fact that the professional Anglophobiac, who has often the Celtic grace of tact and sensitiveness to atmosphere, actually held his tongue for two solid years. America seemed a little dull just at first without his familiar rhetoric, and the calm more uncanny than holy, as though some Niagara had ceased to flow. But we thought steadfastly of all the good it meant for civilization and so bore with his suppression, which turns out after all to have been but for the moment.

It was a question with Englishmen how long this cordiality would last. America had proved herself a good hater. Would she show herself an equally stanch friend? The conversion, it could not be forgotten, had been somewhat sudden. It was, if I remember rightly, one evening at the end of February, or possibly the beginning of March, 1898, that America stumbled upon "a new fact." Forthwith, the case against England was taken down from its hoary shelf, reopened, retried and a verdict of full acquittal given in England's favor before morning. We said good-night with cousinly restraint and fell into one another's arms over the breakfast table as long-lost brothers. It was quick work even for the facile American. Indeed the very ease of the transformation made one suspicious of its durability. True, America at that time was sloughing day after day, without appearing to notice it, other traditions as inveterate and cherished as her belief in English enmity. But that was no guarantee, especially as one noticed signs of an even excessive devotion to the new religion, that the particular change of faith in which we were so interested might not turn out to be merely the output of a lucid interval. The pace struck some anxious observers in England as a little too hot to last. Reformation in a flood is comprehensive enough for the moment, but the flood is apt to abate.

England can never be indifferent to what America thinks of her conduct; but it was with a quite special concern that we watched the slow development of American opinion on this Transvaal question. I believe I am right in saying that at the time of the Bloemfontein Conference the overwhelming majority of Americans—of those, at least, who had troubled their heads about the matter at all—were in sympathy with England. They saw in the South African Republic a sordid and oppressive oligarchy in a state of perpetual opposition to a primary American principle—

the principle that where men are taxed they ought also to have a voice in the government that taxes them. They recognized in the Boers a backward and uncouth community such as the United States had had to deal with in the Mormons. They realized that the unrest in the Transvaal, infecting all parts of South Africa, constituted a state of affairs which Great Britain, with her enormous stake in the country, could not afford to ignore. They perceived that the Jameson Raid was not so much the cause of the disturbance as its result, that President Krüger had failed to carry out any of the reforms solemnly promised to the people of Johannesburg, and that England had stretched almost to the point of weakness the natural hesitancy which a great Power feels in calling a weaker Power to account. They, therefore, looked upon the Conference as the best means of settling an irritating and somewhat undignified dispute, not doubting that it would be successful, or that its outcome would be a satisfactory and harmonious compromise. And this was not only the attitude of America, but of all Europe. It is worth remembering that the necessity of calling upon President Krüger to set his house in order was approved nowhere more emphatically than in France and Germany.

How completely this attitude has changed on the Continent within the last nine months is known and admitted in England. No attempt is made to hide the fact that even in Pitt's time the animosity of France was not more waspish than it is to-day; or that Bismarck's hatred of England is now the common sentiment of all Germany. But whether from that inspired ignorance of things American that still obtains in the United Kingdom—an ignorance which the correspondents of the English papers do very little to dispel and a good deal to foster—or from a blind trust in the permanence of the good feeling that followed the Spanish War, the veering round of American opinion has passed unnoticed or is flatly disbelieved. That it has veered round, it seems to me no Englishman who strives to go about with open eyes and mind can affect to deny. The fact to my observation is so patent and indisputable that I may as well take it for granted and deal with the probable causes of the change, before attempting a composite picture of the American attitude to-day.

It is one of the misfortunes of the British case that it has to depend on the cumulative effect of a large number of details. It

cannot readily be summed up and presented in a single alluring sentence. It is a Blue Book rather than a popular case. It has no attractive catchword to command general sympathy, none at least so attractive as the Boer cry of "Freedom and Independence." One has to carry in one's head a great many dry facts and technical arguments to be convinced of its justice; and this is precisely the sort of labor that the average man shrinks from. He does not want to be bothered about franchise questions and dynamite and railroad monopolies and the liquor laws and the taxation of chemicals, and suzerainty quibbles and tariff and educational minutiae; but to have a square issue neatly served up for his consideration, and the side which can make out the least abstruse case is the side to which his sympathies naturally lean. The squarest issue which came to view on the British side involved a paradox which it was difficult for America to stomach. It hardly seemed reasonable that England should be taking so much trouble to get rid of British subjects and hand them over to an alien State; and it seemed still less reasonable that a refusal on the part of the Transvaal to accept them on England's terms should be made a *casus belli*. Yet, with this exception, no dominating point arose out of the negotiations. Moreover, all the natural advantages, so to speak, of the dispute were on the Boer side. England was heavily handicapped by her size. The smallness of the Boer Republics was an unanswerable appeal to foreign, and especially American, sympathy. So were their history and the flavor of mediæval romance that hung round their lives and character. England, too, had never managed to shake herself free of the suspicion of stock-jobbing and speculative influences in her dealings with the Transvaal.

All this told heavily in favor of the Boers. Even so it might have been counteracted had the conduct of the negotiations been anything but what it was. America was both bored and befogged by Mr. Chamberlain's diplomacy. It tired of trying to keep track of its manifold gyrations, and it failed to detect in the fresh entanglements that each week seemed to produce either any straightforwardness of purpose or any rallying-point round which British sympathizers could gather. Lord Rosebery was complaining the other day that the Prime Minister made it very hard for the man in the street to support his policy. Mr. Chamberlain certainly made it difficult for the man in the cars to support or even com-

prehend his diplomacy. As the weeks dragged on America was puzzled to know whether the Colonial Secretary was deliberately playing for war or hoping to coerce Mr. Krüger by a display of force. In either case his diplomacy seemed tactless, provocative and tortuous. It had the additional demerit of still further clouding the real issue. The climax came without America being able to grasp why it had come or what it was all about.

I have said that the natural, the superficial advantages of the case were all on the Boers' side. It is scarcely necessary to add that their valorous declaration of war confirmed these advantages, which were further strengthened and made more captivating by their surprising successes in the opening phases of the campaign. In a contest between a giant and pigmy it is hard to convince the average onlooker that the giant may, after all, be in the right, and harder still when his huge frame is staggering under the blows of his plucky little opponent.

One of the clearest and most detached observers of American and international politics, discussing the reasons for American sympathy with the Boers, let fall a remark which struck me as eminently just. "You must remember," he said, "that Americans are Gladstonians." Why Americans should elect to take their cue on English issues from a party which has shown itself during the last twenty years to be singularly out of touch with the real movements of English political thought, is a very fruitful question. But the fact that they do instinctively range themselves with the Liberals and against the Conservatives has had a very considerable effect in determining American attitude toward the Transvaal war. The leaders of the chief section of the Liberal party have been unsparing critics of Mr. Chamberlain's diplomacy and of the policy or lack of policy which brought on the war; and the views of Mr. Morley, Mr. Courtney, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and Mr. Bryce—Mr. Bryce above all—have been received in America as revelations of the real and exclusive truth.

Politics, too, have inevitably had their say in the matter. The Democratic opposition to the President's Philippine policy includes denunciation of Great Britain as the "secret ally of the Republican party," the arch-example of Imperialism and the friend and abettor of the American venture in that direction; and the Democratic leaders have been able to make great play with the Boer war as a shocking instance of the fruits of "expansion."

The Republicans have not accepted the challenge or acknowledged the parallel between the Filipinos and the Boers to be exactly on all fours; but an uneasy sense of what might be made out of the comparison has possibly kept their sympathy for the Boers within the bounds of temperance. The Democrats, on the other hand, "unfettered by a sense of crime"—in a way not intended by the poet—and overflowing with a novel but politically very useful zeal for abstract humanitarianism, have loosed their souls with satisfying and comfortable freedom.

And then, of course, there has been our delightful old friend, the professional Anglophobic, resurrected anew after two years' interment. This has been a great and glorious time for him. He has bought flags and held meetings and passed resolutions to his heart's and lungs' content. He has cheered with intelligent fervor the amiable Mr. Bourke Cockran's description of Englishmen as "a set of perjurers," "ruffians in finance and ruffians in everything," and groaned with approving horror when this same accomplished publicist informed him that "in England a Catholic cannot hold office," and that the Uitlanders in the Transvaal numbered 35,000 and the Boers about 150,000. There even seemed to be a Vice-Presidential "boom" within reach of the still more amiable gentleman who publicly prayed that the war might "send up the price of crêpe in England." And so, no doubt, there would have been in years gone by. But to-day it is one of the Anglophobic's many grievances that the genuine American no longer attends his meetings. Dutch-Americans and Irish-Americans and other hyphenated Americans are there in plenty, but not the real article. The tail-twister has done his best since the war broke out, and no doubt influenced some people, but the really palmy age of Anglophobia seems to have passed. It has been made too pitifully apparent that nine-tenths of his love for the Boers is made up of his hatred of the English, and the other tenth of ignorance of South Africa. In spite of his best exertions, the country is not greatly moved to see him exploiting the Boers, as five years ago he was exploiting the Venezuelans, to damage "the common enemy."

There is one curious obsession, of quite surprising hold on the average mind, which has driven many Americans to the Boer side. You will hear it trumpeted from all pro-Boer platforms and made the basis of their appeal for American support. Taking

part during the last few months in various joint debates before clubs and literary societies in and around New York, I have seen my opponents dangle it before even intelligent audiences. The main fallacy is this—that the Transvaal war is a war between a monarchy and a republic, consequently between a system of tyranny and darkness and a system of liberty and enlightenment; and to it is appended a corollary to the effect that America is bound to sympathize with any and every republic in a conflict with any and every monarchy. It is hardly worth while to discuss such an elementary absurdity in the pages of this REVIEW—to inquire why Americans should consider the American idea to be wrapped up in the accident of a republican form of government instead of with the essential principles of democracy that underlie that form; to ask why they should prefer to stand by the great name instead of the great thing; or to point out that, anyway, the Transvaal had nothing republican about it except its title; that it was, in fact, a despotism masquerading under republican insignia, and that its whole policy and conception of the art of government were a flat denial of everything that America stands for. It is only in a country where education is rampant and the average man instructed up to the point where he may think foolishly for himself and resent being told how to think rightly by his natural leaders, that such a notion could hold its own for long.

A more respectable error which has doubtless estranged a good many would-be sympathizers with the British cause, is the suspicion that England is fighting for the gold mines or for territory. It would, of course, be just as sensible to say that America fought Spain for tobacco and the Philippines. We are not fighting for territory, for the sufficient reason that the Transvaal has no strategical or commercial attractiveness, outside of the Rand; and we are not fighting for gold mines (*a.*) because we own them already; (*b.*) because even if we didn't they would not be worth a conflict—our whole imperial policy forbidding us to draw any sort of direct profit from colonial wealth and thus making it a matter of completest indifference, from the financial point of view, whether the gold mines are on British territory or not; and (*c.*)—and Americans should not need to be told this—because the morality of the English-speaking people is such that you will never find any branch of it waging war for a purely selfish and mercantile purpose.

Such, so far as I have been able to gauge them, are the main causes, artificial and otherwise, which have operated on American opinion to the disadvantage of the British. It is a more difficult matter to say with any precision how great their effect may have been or what is the exact attitude of America to-day. Certain features of that attitude, however, are, I think, indisputable.

The educated classes of the United States—the best opinion of the country—take up pretty much the same ground as that occupied by Mr. Bryce and the Liberals. That is to say, they believe that the grievances of the Uitlanders were real and vexatious, and such as the home Government was justified in seeking redress for. But they also hold that the time for entering on the question was singularly ill-chosen; that a few years more of patience would have allowed the memories of the Jameson Raid to die away and given the reforming party among the Boers a chance to regather strength, and that all the natural forces were on the side of the Uitlanders, not the least of them being the great age of the President and the certainty that his successor would have not one-tenth of his influence.

They hold, too, that nothing is to be gained from the war that can outweigh the inevitable alienation of the Dutch colonists and the enormous difficulty of governing the Transvaal and Orange Free State. They are entirely sceptical of the alleged Dutch plot to oust the British from South Africa. They are vigorous and pertinent critics of Mr. Chamberlain's diplomacy in setting to work by means of a semi-public conference, the break-down of which could only add to the ill-feeling on both sides; in making the franchise the chief issue and so neglecting to establish a legal *casus belli*; in raising the irritating and profitless question of suzerainty; in writing ambiguous dispatches just at the moment when the utmost precision was needed; and in adopting throughout the negotiations a tone of "monocular insolence" highly injurious to the prospects of peace. In other words, they consider the war a gigantic and unnecessary blunder which a more tactful diplomacy would have avoided. But that is the extent of their pro-Boer sympathies. They are under no illusions as to the real character of the Transvaal Government, and while admiring the sturdy courage of the Boers, are very far from wishing to see it prevail. In their view the British, fundamentally in the right, have put themselves, technically, in the wrong. They justify the

object aimed at without approving of the means. They wish that a peaceful solution had been found—believe, indeed, that a peaceful solution could have been found—but, war having come, they range themselves unhesitatingly on the side of the higher civilization. They appreciate the fact that the ultimate defeat of the British would entail the loss of the whole of South Africa and with it the beginning of the end of the British Empire; and to avoid such a worldwide catastrophe, they are constrained, somewhat regretfully, to sacrifice the Boers on the altar of necessity.

Such, I believe, to be the views generally held with a few variations here and there, among the most intelligent people of the United States. I cannot help thinking also that they reflect in the main the great body of American opinion. There are some who carry their objections to the war further than others, who denounce it as a “gold hunters’ conspiracy,” and believe with Mr. Morley that it is simply the culmination of a sordid plot of English and foreign capitalists against the Transvaal and at the expense of Great Britain; and that England has been used as a mere pawn in a game of bulls and bears. There are others, too, who stigmatize it as “a war of conquest,” or “lust for gold.” But even among these I do not detect any desire for the triumph of Boer arms. I have met very few Americans who believed in Mr. Chamberlain’s convenient theory that the war was “inevitable;” I have met a great many who have denounced it as a crime, and more still who have anathematized it as a blunder; but I have failed to come across any who would not agree to the proposition that it was better for the world at large that England should succeed. The sentiments of Americans may be pro-Boer, but their reason is pro-British.

There is, however, a clique composed of one or two Senators, and a large number of Irish and Dutch-Americans, backed up by a few “yellow” journals, which openly gloats over the reverses to British arms, and works mightily for the Boer cause. It is a noisy and demonstrative clique, and having some political influence, can get pro-Boer resolutions passed by municipalities and such like bodies. But it does not in any way represent the real feelings of Americans, and it has conspicuously failed to move the Administration from its position of strict neutrality. The collapse of its efforts and the generally temperate tone of even the most pronounced Boer newspapers are, I think, the best answer to the question raised at the

beginning of this article as to the stability of the new régime of Anglo-American friendship. The struggle with the Transvaal has greatly moved the country. Almost from the first it killed the small interest still surviving in the Philippine war and quite overshadowed the currency debates in Congress. It became, in fact, the most prominent of American public questions, influencing politics and engaging the keenest attention of millions. Yet the discussion of it, both in and out of Congress, except among a discredited and dubious faction, has been on the whole courteous, well-informed and restrained—in singular contrast to the wild virulence of Continental critics. The Senate, which more than once was given an opportunity of expressing itself with pristine freedom, held its emotions in unwonted check. The State Department declined most significantly to be drawn into any action at which Great Britain could take umbrage, and its attitude was but the official reflection of the people's wishes. One has only to imagine the tornado of invective that would have whirled over the country had the Boer war broken out five years ago to gauge how far America has travelled from the point of view which made the Venezuelan outburst possible.

SYDNEY BROOKS.